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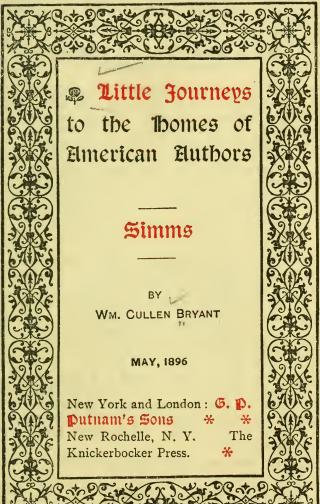








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Little Journeys

SERIES FOR 1896

Little Journeys to the Homes of American Authors

The papers below specified, were, with the exception of that contributed by the editor, Mr. Hubbard, originally issued by the late G. P. Putnam, in 1853, in a series entitled Homes of American Authors. It is now nearly half a century since this series (which won for itself at the time a very noteworthy prestige) was brought before the public; and the present publishers feel that no apology is needed in presenting to a new generation of American readers papers of such distinctive biographical interest and literary value.

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"2, Bryant, by Caroline M. Kirkland.
3, Prescott, by Geo. S. Hillard.
4, Lowell, by Charles F. Briggs.
5, Simms, by Wm. Cullen Bryant.
6, Walt Whitman, by Elbert Hubbard.
7, Hawthorne, by Geo. Wm. Curtis.
8, Audubon, by Parke Godwin.
9, Irving, by H. T. Tuckerman.
10, Longfellow, by Geo. Wm. Curtis.
11, Everett, by Geo. S. Hillard.
12, Bancroft, by Geo. W. Greene.

The above papers, which will form the series of Little Journeys for the year 1896, will be issued monthly, beginning January, in the same general style as the series of 1895, at 50cts. a year. Single copies, 5 cts., postage paid.

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THE KNICKERBOCKER PRESS, NEW ROCHELLE, N. Y.

SIMMS

Lithe and long as the serpent train,
Springing and clinging from tree to tree,
Now darting upward, now down again,
With a twist and a twirl that are strange to see;
Never took serpent a deadlier hold,
Never the cougar a wilder spring,
Strangling the oak with the boa's fold,
Spanning the beech with the condor's wing.

Yet no foe that we fear to seek,—
The boy leaps wild to thy rude embrace;
Thy bulging arms bear as soft a cheek
As ever on lover's breast found place;
On thy waving train is a playful hold
Thou shalt never to lighter grasp persuade;
While a maiden sits in thy drooping fold,
And swings and sings in the noonday shade!

-The Grape-Vine Swing.

FOREWORD

THIS sketch, from the pen of Mr. Bryant, was done "by request." Very possibly it was written and disposed of at a single sitting. It is straightforward, explicit, and to the point, like one of his *Evening Post* editorials. It is manly in sentiment, grammatically expressed, contains no dangerous logic, and can safely be recommended for the Young Person.

Bryant was born in 1794, and at the time of this writing was fifty-eight years old. Simms was twelve years his junior, but his name was among the very first of the writers of his time; while Bryant was known only as an editor who had written some good verse and some not so good. In fact Bryant was a disappointment to his friends (as most gifted men are), for in *Thanatopsis* he set a pace that he never afterward equalled. And it was Greeley who said that he never ceased to regret the fact that Bryant did not die at twenty, for then the world could have

marvelled at the things he left unwrit and shown the *Thanatopsis* as a sample of the tomes that might have been.

But we of to-day are thankful for the example of that well-rounded life with its beautiful old age, frosty but kindly; and I never take down a volume of the *Library of Poetry and Song* without saying grace.

We may search in vain in America for a school-boy of twelve who does not know Bryant, but when I asked a gentlemanly and intelligent attendant at the Boston Public Library to fetch me any volume of prose by Simms, he brought me Sims on Gynecology. I gazed at the book with lack-lustre eye, and shot just one reproachful glance at the attendant. And it was then that that charming little old gentleman in the dusty grey suit came to me and divining my wants (as he always does), told me that no one to speak of reads Simms now. Then he led me back through a labyrinth of cases, and amid a maze of shelves showed me rows on rows of books labelled Simms that no one ever calls for. "And I remember the time when he was as popular as Mr. Howells is to-day!" said the old gentleman.

As Nature works incessantly to cover the leaves of last year, so does Fate seek to hide the fame that yesterday loomed large. And although Mr. John Burroughs says, "Serene I fold my hands and wait," vet for the moment let us lay aside sentiment and admit that Chance plays a most important part in keeping alive the names of greatness gone. We live in a costermonger time, when virtue is not its own reward, when innocence is not a sufficient shield, and when merit, unpuffed, is soon forgot. It is not moth and rust, nor the incomparable excellence of the contemporaneous, that causes the old to be brushed into the dust-bin, but it is the poppy fumes of forgetfulness.

But in the interests of Truth let us admit that what we call the God of Chance is only another name for Law not Understood. It is so easy to dispose of the matter by the canting phrase i' the nose, "Merit is sure to win," but before it is fact it must be amended thus: "Merit is sure to win if well advertised." Good books, like good thread, good soap, good horse-shoe nails, and good baking powder, must be properly presented. Truth can stand alone, but no book is truth;

it is only an endeavor to express truth, and will die the death if not advertised by its enemies or its loving friends.

Six men in New England have made a lasting-place for themselves in American Letters. Their work was good, but this alone (with a single exception) would not have floated it. It was necessary that they should stand by each other, and they did. There was an unwritten agreement that Boston and Cambridge should protect their own. This was done through the cult of a great University, through the Lyceum, and through the magazines controlled by publishers that were party to the alliance. An occasional growl in the way of a Fable for Critics, only advertised all hands. And now from time to time elegant reprints of the works of these six men are gotten out by New York and Boston publishers, and magazines, societies, clubs, and descendants keep the work fresh before the people.

The books of J. G. Holland, Margaret Fuller, Geo. S. Hillard, Chas. F. Briggs, Henry T. Tuckerman, and others have sunk by their own weight, while the graceful and superficial writings of Willis may be said to have drifted into oblivion because of their lack of weight. The

work was good, but not good enough, yet six of the old guard live, and I am glad that this is so. And all the point I would now make is that when Mr. Simms moved from Massachusetts to South Carolina he courted Oblivion and—won her.

But genius is constantly being "discovered." See what Fitzgerald did for Omar Khayyam, whose Rubaiyat is now published in America by seventeen firms; behold how Boyesen discovered Ibsen and Howells sweeping the horizon with his telescope on the lookout for a genius, spied Tolstoy and cried "There she blows!" remember how Thoreau introduced Ruskin to America and Emerson brought out Carlyle. And so I await the advent of some Columbus on the Sea of Letters who shall give us back that lost Atalantis, William Gilmore Simms, who Mr. Bryant says wrote fifty volumes -poems, plays, novels, histories, and biographies. Some of these fifty books may be crude and gushing, but others there be that show a splendid insight into truth, a delicate sensibility, a broad and generous sympathy, and withal the great and tender heart of a noble man.

E. H.



SIMMS.

BY WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.*

Gilmore Simms is on the plantation of his father-in-law, Mr. Roach, in Barnwell District, South Carolina, near Midway, a railway station at just half the distance between Charleston and Augusta. Here he passes half the year, the most agreeable half in that climate,—its pleasant winter, and portions of its spring and autumn—in a thinly settled country divided into large plantations, principally yielding cotton, with smaller fields of maize, sweet pota-

^{*} Written in 1853 for Putnam's Homes of American Authors.

toes, pea-nuts, and other productions of the region, to which sugar-cane has lately been added.

Forests of oak, and of the majestic long-leaved pine, surround the dwelling, interspersed with broad openings, and stretch far away on all sides. In the edge of one of these are the habitations of the negroes by whom the plantation is cultivated, who are indulgently treated and lead an easy life. The bridle-roads through these noble forests, over the hard white sand, from which rise the lofty stems of the pines, are very beautiful. Sometimes they wind by the borders of swamps, green in mid-winter with the holly, the red bay, and other trees that wear their leaves throughout the year, among which the yellow jessamine twines itself and forms dense arbors, perfuming the air in March to a great distance with the delicate odor of its blossoms. In the midst of these swamps rises the tall Virginia cypress, with its roots in the dark water, the sum-

mer haunt of the alligator, who sleeps away the winter in holes made under the bank. Mr. Simms, both in his poetry and prose, has made large and striking use of the imagery supplied by the peculiar scenery of this region.

The house is a spacious country dwelling, without any pretensions to architectural elegance, comfortable for the climate, though built without that attention to what a South Carolinian would call the unwholesome exclusion of the outer air which is thought necessary in these colder latitudes. Around it are scattered a number of smaller buildings of brick, and a little further stand rows and clumps of evergreens—the wateroak, with its glistening light-colored foliage, the live-oak, with darker leaves, and the Carolina bird-cherry, one of the most beautiful trees of the South, blooming before the winter is past, and murmuring with multitudes of bees. In one of the lower rooms of this dwelling, in the midst of a well-chosen library, many

of the books which comprise the numerous catalogue of Mr. Simms' works were written.

Mr. Simms was born April 17, 1806, in the State of South Carolina. It was at first intended that he should study medicine, but his inclinations having led him to the law, he devoted himself to the study of that profession. His literary habits are very uniform. His working hours usually commence in the morning, and last till two or three in the afternoon, after which he indulges in out-door recreations, in reading, or society. If friends or visitors break into his hours of morning labor, which he does not often permit, he usually redeems the lost time at night, after the guests have retired. He is a late sitter, and consequently a late riser. Landscape gardening is one of his favorite pastimes, and the grounds adjoining his residence afford agreeable evidence of his good taste.

Mr. Simms is a man of athletic make.

A full muscular development, and a fresh complexion, give token of vigorous health, which however is not without its interruptions; for aithough not indisposed to physical exertion, the inclination to mental activity in the form of literary occupation, predominates with him over every other taste and pursuit.

His manners, like the expression of his countenance, are singularly frank and ingenuous, his temper generous and sincere, his domestic affections strong, his friendships faithful and lasting, and his life blameless. No man ever wore his character more in the general sight of men than he, or had ever less occasion to do otherwise. The activity of mind of which I have spoken, is as apparent in his conversation as in his writings. He is fond of discussion, likes to pursue an argument to its final retreat, and is not unwilling to complete disquisition which others, in their ordinary discourse, would leave in outline. He has travelled extensively, mingling freely with all classes,

and has accumulated an apparently exhaustless fund of anecdotes and incidents, illustrative of life and manners. These he relates, with great zest and inimitable humor, reproducing to perfection the peculiar dialect and tones of the various characters introduced, whether sand-lapper, backwoodsman, half-breed, or negro.

His literary character has this peculiarity which I may call remarkable, that writing as he does with very great rapidity, and paying little regard to the objections brought by others against what he writes, he has gone on improving upon himself. His first attempts in poetry were crude and jejune. As he proceeded, he left them immeasurably behind, in command of materials and power of execution, till in his beautiful poem of Atalantis, the finest, I think, he has written, his faculties seem to have nearly reached their maturity in this department. One of his pieces, entitled The Edge of the Swamp, may be quoted here not only as a specimen of his descriptive verse, but

as an illustration of the peculiar source from which his imagery is derived:

'T is a wild spot and hath a gloomy look;

The bird sings never merrily in the trees,

And the young leaves seem blighted. A rank

growth

Spreads poisonously round, with power to taint With blistering dews the thoughtless hand that dares

To penetrate the covert. Cypresses Crowd on the dank, wet earth; and, stretched at length,

The cayman—a fit dweller in such home—
Slumbers, half buried in the sedgy grass,
Beside the green ooze where he shelters him,
A whooping crane erects his skeleton form,
And shrieks in flight. Two summer ducks
aroused

To apprehension, as they hear his cry,
Dash up from the lagoon, with marvellous haste,
Following his guidance. Meetly taught by these,
And startled at our rapid, near approach,
The steel-jawed monster, from his grassy bed,
Crawls slowly to his slimy, green abode,
Which straight receives him. You behold him
now,

His ridgy back uprising as he speeds, In silence, to the centre of the stream, Whence his head peers alone. A butterfly

That, travelling all the day, has counted climes Only by flowers, to rest himself awhile, Lights on the monster's brow. The surly mute Straightway goes down, so suddenly, that he, The dandy of the summer flowers and woods, Dips his light wings, and spoils his golden coat, With the rank water of that turbid pond. Wondering and vexed, the plumed citizen Flies with an hurried effort, to the shore, Seeking his kindred flowers:—but seeks in vain—

Nothing of genial growth may there be seen,
Nothing of beautiful! Wild, ragged trees,
That look like felon spectres, fetid shrubs,
That taint the gloomy atmosphere—dusk shades,
That gather, half a cloud, and half a fiend
In aspect, lurking on the swamp's wild edge—
Gloom with their sternness and forbidding
frowns

The general prospect. The sad butterfly, Waving his lackered wings, darts quickly on, And, by his free flight, counsels us to speed For better lodgings, and a scene more sweet Than these drear borders offer us to-night.

Mr. Simms' prose writings show a similar process of gradual improvement, though in them the change is less marked, owing to his having appeared

before the public as a novelist at a riper period of his literary life. In all that he has written his excellences are unborrowed; their merits are the development of original native germs, without any apparent aid from models. His thoughts, his diction, his arrangement are his own: he reminds you of no other author; even in the lesser graces of literary execution, he combines languages after no pattern set by other authors, however beautiful.

His novels have a wide circulation, and are admired for the rapidity and fervor of the narrative, their picturesque descriptions, the energy with which they express the stronger emotions, and the force with which they portray local manners. His critical writings, which have appeared in the Southern periodicals and are quite numerous, are less known. They often, no doubt, have in them those imperfections which belong to rapid composition, but I must be allowed to single out from among them one example of great excellence, his analysis and esti-

mate of the literary character of Cooper, a critical essay of great depth and discrimination, to which I am not sure that anything hitherto written on the same subject is fully equal. He published his Lyrics, in 1825, eighteen years ago; his longest and best poem, Atalantis, a Story of the Sea, in 1832; Martin Faber, Guy Rivers, Yemasee, Partisan, Mellichampe, and many others, in succession. The entire series of his works, poetry and prose, comprises about fifty volumes.

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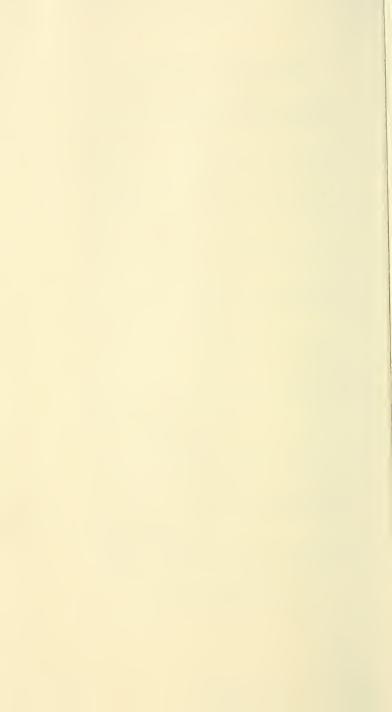
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